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NEWS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON EQUIPS FACULTY WITH HIGH-TECH PLAGIARISM-DETECTION SOFTWARE

DAYTON, Ohio — The University of Dayton has acquired a high-tech tool to combat student plagiarism. The school has just signed a one-year subscription with Turnitin, a plagiarism-detection software company.

Last year UD held training sessions for faculty members to teach them to spot digital plagiarism and plan their own anti-plagiarism strategies. Arming instructors with the latest tool was the next logical step, said Heidi Good, a government documents librarian at UD's Roesch Library who offered Turnitin workshops to faculty members.

"Cheating will always be a constant on campuses," Good said. "But the Internet has created new, more sophisticated ways of plagiarizing. We now have a sophisticated way to detect plagiarism."

A 1999 study by the Center for Academic Integrity supports Good's claim. It found that 69 percent of professors catch one or more students plagiarizing each year. In an earlier study, the center polled 7,000 U.S. college students on academic cheating, finding that nearly 80 percent said they believe it occurs on their campus.

It's a fairly simple process: Professors, or students themselves, upload papers to the software company's Web site (<http://www.turnitin.com>). The service then provides "originality reports" on every paper submitted, not just those that indicate similarities to other sources.

"I compare it to a search engine," Good said. "But unlike a search engine, which can only handle several words or a short phrase, Turnitin can search by the whole paper. It goes beyond conventional methods because it can detect fragments of copied text down to seven words."

Specifically, each paper is compared to billions of Internet sources and the student papers stored in the Turnitin database. The originality report provides an "overall similarity index" that rates on a scale the paper's likeness to other sources and a "report links" that color codes sentences with matching words or phrases, corresponding the color to a color-coded URL of the Web site it came from.

Katie Snarey, a UD graduate assistant who teaches two freshman English composition

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classes, uses Turnitin not so much as a "gotcha" detection device as an instructional aid.

"I do think that it is useful as a deterrent," Snarey said. "(This semester) I told my students ahead of time that I would require them to submit their papers to the Web site. I even brought in copies of the (Turnitin originality) reports to show them how it works.

"But I think that if it is used in a classroom, it is good to do so in partnership with the students," she added. "We both were really interested in seeing how accurate it was. Therefore, I did not present myself as a plagiarism detective but as another interested spectator. I even submitted one of my papers and brought it in to show them. I think that if I had not been open with them from the start there may have been objections."

Snarey said the results were "extremely accurate" in terms of picking up on material from the Internet. "It was also very easy to interpret."

Before Turnitin Laura Elizabeth, also a freshman English composition instructor, said she spent as much as two hours per paper checking for plagiarism. She would look "with a careful eye" for language shifts, where a student's writing style or vocabulary deviated from what was typical for the student. Elizabeth also used traditional search engines and even asked other faculty if they recognized suspicious passages from her students' work.

"If I was really feeling stubborn, I would go to the library and look through some of the most obvious print sources," Elizabeth said. "It felt quite laborious."

Like most faculty who teach a course that will involve a paper, Elizabeth lectures to students against plagiarism, offering real examples of professionals and students who have suffered the consequences for their unauthorized "borrowing" of other people's work.

"I let my students know that I am an attentive professor who knows about the many online paper mills and about how to check for plagiarism using tools like Google and Turnitin," she said. "Some students need to know that instructors are watching for this.

"Otherwise," Elizabeth added, "where will they be in the work world when the penalties are so much more public and potentially career ending?"